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The Story of Vigo

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Old Vigo

Hero of Vincennes, Terre Haute and
Vigo County

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Hidden Heroes of the Rockies'
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Col. Francis Vigo

Foreword

Everybody knows Alice of Old Vincennes, and now the time has come when all the world should know her friend and compatriot, Colonel Francis Vigo of Vigo County and also of Vincennes and the Great Northwest Territory.

Vigo once was famous in the valley where the Wabash flows and all people dwelling here looked to him in an hour of peril and very great alarm, dependent upon him as to whether America was ever going to establish her government of Freedom in this land. Vigo lived and wrought mightily for the destiny we call America—but after that the dust of many motor cars settled over name and fame, and a younger generation has come whose members often know him not.

It is to them that these words of remembrance for one of America's greatest builders and heroes are addressed.

In preparing it we must here give grateful thanks to Mrs. Sally Hughes, Librarian of the Emeline Fairbanks Memorial Library at Terre Haute, to A. R. Markle, descendant of one of the Famous Five who were the first proprietors of Terre Haute, to the Veteran Firemen's Association, who recovered, after losing it, the fire engine to which they had given the name of "Old Vigo" and to the Fortnightly Club of Vincennes. These good folks have taken a broader and better view of the Past than merely to wish to see it forgotten. Mrs. Hughes has faithfully collected at the Terre Haute Library all data it is possible to obtain about the man who financed America's invasion of the Wabash valley and helped so earnestly to bring about American dominion here.

Mr. Markle, by becoming family historian, has preserved something of the story of his pioneer ancestor, while the Fortnightly Club of Vincennes has furnished an Open Sesame to the eras of French, British and American beginnings there.

To all of these and many other sources we are deeply indebted for the material of this narration.

To the veterans of the Terre Haute Fire Department, who call themselves the "Old Vamps," and chose this name long before it took

on the peculiar slant the movies gave it, "Old Vigo" is a much beloved fire engine which they pulled to many a blaze in the young days of Terre Haute.

To the school children "Old Vigo" is a bell that rings the hour for starting to school and the passing hours for play and study.

But to gain an introduction in person to Colonel Francis Vigo, the "Old Vigo" of our story, it will be necessary for us to push backward to the time of George Washington, when as a young man, he delighted to cheer for "Zhorzh Vasington."

Some men are born, seemingly, to be go-getters. They accumulate much and hold to it. Others seem to be born to be go-givers. Vigo was one of these. You might almost say he gave the verdant Wabash Valley to America, and America held it while Vigo held the—well we can leave that part of the story until we tell the message that "Old Vigo," the bell, tolls out to Vigo County folk.

The Story of Vigo

What Vigo means to America we can record simply by sketching the scene at the treaty table where Washington's victory at Yorktown was glorified by the setting up of a free American nation.

"We shall draw the boundary line along the line of the Ohio River," suggested the British commissioners.

"No," answered the Americans, "the Wabash valley is ours. Our General George Rogers Clark led an armed force of Americans against your posts south of Detroit and captured and held the Wabash Valley to the end of the War. So that territory belongs to us."

And the Americans at the treaty board sketched a line so that it would include what came to be known as the Northwest Territory, that is, all of the territory now known as the five great states of Michigan, Wisconsin, Illinois, Indiana and Ohio. The treaty was drawn to conform to this idea, and America's title to this pleasant country was not again challenged until the dark days of the War of 1812. And then it was that Terre Haute played her fine role, for at Fort Harrison, just outside the town-site, young Zachary Taylor—later to become famous as "Old Zack," hero and President, fought off invading Indian hosts sent on a raid by the British, and so accustomed himself to the smoke and dangers of battle that he was later to win his way to the White House in the midst of the Mexican War's alarms. And "Old Zach" Taylor was not the only President who grew out of the dramatic events in which Vigo of Vigo County played a large role. Harrison, builder of Fort Harrison where Zachary Taylor made his great stand, made his way to the White House and it was partly through his campaign against the Indian chief Tecumseh, during which he built this very Fort Harrison where the Fort Harrison Country Club now stands.

A Famous Trio

Harrison and Vigo were friends, and friendly with them, making a famous trio, was George Rogers Clark, hero of the Battle of

Vincennes, who there struck down British power in all territory south of the Great Lakes.

How did it fall to the lot of a Spaniard to practically present America with the states of Michigan, Wisconsin, Illinois, Indiana, and Ohio? Strange things like that have happened many times in America's story for when the young star of America was not yet



risen in the east there seemed to be a singing together of the other stars that then were mighty.

People in Boston and New York cheered lustly when they welcomed the coming of Lafayette and learned that the French fleet would watch the British fleet and keep it from harming Washington's cause. The direct message of what Lafayette had done did not come across to the Creole population of Vincennes, but those people of the Wabash valley sensed some glimmer of it. They had sentiments—and all these were for Washington and the young America.

Among these people was Vigo. Born in Sardinia in 1740, Francis Vigo early developed a love for arms. He enlisted in a Spanish regiment and learned something of those world-wars for power which set the British fleet at the throat of the Spanish-Armada and started all Europe in a competitive battle for the conquest of the Western Hemisphere. He gained a Spaniard's wish to see Spain and not England triumphant in the New America. To hold up Spain's power young Vigo was sent with his regiment to Cuba, and with a battalion of the regiment he was transferred to New Orleans.

Thus he first set foot on American soil, ready for the great role it fell to his lot to play in the upbuilding of this America. At this time the Mississippi River route to the fur country was the route that the hardest adventurers took. August Chateau of New Orleans was founding St. Louis, and trapping parties under Manuel Lisa of New Orleans were pushing up the great Missouri.

Along this path pushed young Vigo. He set up a trapping station at Kaskaskia and became known everywhere up and down the river as a successful trapper and trader. He had credit in New Orleans and many a heavily loaded bateau was poled up the Wabash with goods to be traded by him to the Indians of the Indian town that afterwards grew to be Terre Haute.

While thus prospering as a trader, with depots even above St. Louis, Vigo encountered his Great Opportunity to serve. It came in the person of a force of men from Virginia—American backwoodsmen, seeking battle with the British. These Americans were less than 200 in number but in those days 200 men or less were turning many a vital corner of History.

When Clark's Men Came

Why had George Rogers Clark come away out here to the Wabash Valley and beyond at such a dark hour in American affairs? The fighting was on the seacoast; yet there was a vital issue inland for Thomas Jefferson and Patrick Henry, Virginia's Governor, had become greatly disturbed over Indian massacres on Virginia's western frontier. There were stories that the British commanders at Detroit and Vincennes and Kaskaskia were offering rewards for American

scalps and were arming and equipping the Indians for these scalp-taking forays.

To save American lives it seemed that America must possess the Wabash Valley,—for that was the boat route down into the heart of the Middle West from Canada. It is odd but true that the Wabash was known long before the Ohio River was known. As early as 1759 French troops travelled from New Orleans to Detroit by way of the Mississippi, the Ohio, the Wabash, as far as Fort Wayne, and then over a portage to the Maumee, and down that to the Great Lakes. The French called it the *Oubache*. Father Marquette, the famous Canadian explorer, steered his course up the *Oubache*, in company with Father Joliet, in May, 1673, and they considered the Ohio River to be so unimportant that map makers of that day noted down the point where it reaches the Mississippi as “the mouth of the *Oubache*.” To the “Post,” as the fortified settlement at Vincennes was called, came the bateaux of three great powers, bearing each in their turn the mosquetaire of Louis XV of France, the grenadier of George III of England, and the embattled backwoodsmen sent out by Thomas Jefferson and Patrick Henry of Virginia.

Now the backwoodsmen that Jefferson and Patrick Henry had sent were strong in that righteousness that thrice armed a man with a just cause, but they were strong in nothing else.

George Rogers Clark, only a slender youngster 27 years old at the time, and anything but paunchy and prepossessing as a general should be, mustered his army of less than 200 men, stung to it by a sense of the wrong committed against his people by Indian pillagers.

That is how it happens Francis Vigo could perform such a great role as fell to his lot. On January 29, 1779, Clark met at Kaskaskia the modest little Spaniard who was to bring such good fortune to his arms. Clark's troops were without clothing. Their powder supply was low. They needed food and transport. All these Vigo knew how to obtain or had at his trading depots. He furnished hides for mocassins, cloth for raiment, powder and lead. And thereby hangs the tale that “Old Vigo,” the Bell rings out over Vigo County for Vigo accepted drafts on the State of Virginia for these supplies. They were four in number and totalled in original value \$11,387.40.

Vigo did not do business with Clark as a merchant, seeking profits. He equipped him for battle—and then led him on his way so that he could give battle most advantageously. First of all, there was a beautiful personal adventure in the form of a spy's journey to Vincennes. Vigo said he would go over land to the enemy's stronghold and spy out the land. He started—and was led a captive within the British post at Vincennes, then called Fort Sackville. Some were for putting Vigo to death. But the British commander took note of the sympathies of the population. It was a Creole population presided over by a priest named Gibault. What Vigo did he could not have done without Father Gibault and what both Vigo and Father Gibault did they could not have done without Clark's backwoods riflemen. So these were the "Three Mosquetaries" of American destiny on the Wabash.

Another Nathan Hale

Vigo normally should have suffered the fate that Nathan Hale suffered for his adventuring within another section of the British lines in the same war and for the same cause. Only, Nathan Hale offered the one life he had to lose to his *native* land. Francis Vigo had offered his to an *adopted* land—to an infant cause that was only as yet a New Born Hope within the world. While he was held to daily reporting at the Fort, Father Gibault marched his congregation from his church to the doors of Fort Sackville and pounded heavily on the outer door of the stockade in the name of the Lord.

When asked what he wanted, he replied that he wanted the person of Francis Vigo, for the populace did not approve of his being locked up and held as a spy. Father Gibault felt all the sympathy for the Virginians that Vigo felt. Vigo was released—promising not to tell the American force at Kaskaskia—*anything while en route to St. Louis.*

And Vigo kept his word for he made the long journey to St. Louis and then turned right around again, with only a change of clothing, and visited the American camp. He laid before General Clark, whose title then was only that of Lieutenant Colonel, a plan for a *winter march* against the British Post at Vincennes. The thing that made Vigo believe it would succeed was its very audacity

—a winter march. It would have to be into the flooded valley of the Wabash—and this river was, even then, famous for its wide expanse of bordering back water.

The plan was accepted and Clark set forth in Vigo-made equipment. The American flag had been flown in Vincennes before this time. Father Gibault had run it up at the post after a conference with the American commander at Kaskaskia. This was in August, 1778, while the British commander, Governor Abbot, was absent on a visit to Detroit. The British rushed Colonel Hamilton down with a force of British regulars to recapture the fort and re-establish British rule. Father Gibault had installed an American Commandant in the person of Captain Helm, who with Captains Bowman and Harrod were the subordinate company chiefs of General Clark's scant little army. The news that Vigo brought back to General Clark was that the new British force had arrived, had repaired the Fort, which he had studied closely while a prisoner within it, and were holding Captain Helm of General Clark's army, as a prisoner of war.

Our Flag Hauled Down

Could General Clark re-establish American rule? Vigo insisted that he could, and all went well on the long march thither until the Wabash lowlands were reached. The troops, now reduced to a total of 170 men, saw with dismay the neck-deep water they must wade through. Coming out from Virginia in the summer of 1778, these men had crossed the Falls of the Ohio during a total eclipse of the sun. That seemed enough of an evil omen, but wading to battle in neck-deep water filled with floating ice seemed even worse.

Clark had a drummer boy he had picked up in Kaskaskia because he loved the stirring notes of his drum. He mounted this boy on the shoulders of a six-foot sergeant and ordered him to drum away at "Forward—Charge." The drum did the work—for in plunged the men, all save a few who were sick and for whom boats had been provided.

Fortunately, we have the words of one of General Clark's own aides for what followed:

"On February 23d, we set off to cross the plain called Horse Shoe Plain. Here we expected some of our brave men must surely

perish, the breast-high water having frozen in the night and the men having fasted so long. Having no other recourse but wading this frozen lake we plunged in with courage, Colonel Clark being first. Never were men so animated with the thought of avenging the ravages done their back settlements as this small army was."

"At one o'clock we came in sight of the town. We halted on a small hill of dry land called Warren's Island, where we took a prisoner hunting ducks, who informed us no persons suspected our coming at that season of the year. Colonel Clark sent a letter by him to the inhabitants."

Fear and a Fate

This letter, with two that followed it, dictating terms of surrender, is a classic in its way. Perhaps it was like a finger of doom, pointing to a fate that Commander Hamilton had long feared. It mentioned him under a title that bespoke all the vengeful spirit of Virginians against Indian atrocities. "The Hair Buyer General" was the sobriquet Clark gave to his antagonist. He asked all inhabitants of Vincennes who wanted to fight with "The Hair Buyer General" to repair to his fort and fight with him. He warned them that if any were found afterwards, outside of the fort, who had fought, they would be severely punished. To all who remained peaceably at home he promised good treatment as "true friends of Liberty." Clark, through Vigo and Father Gibault, had come to know his population. They carried no tales that would help the British commander to prepare for a siege.

Throwing 200 men into battle array may seem to a World War veteran a job amounting to nothing at all, but to Clark it was a very serious matter. He made three detachments out of his troops. One he marched by the levee towards Fort Sackville on the high land just south of where the bridge now crosses the Wabash at Vincennes. Another section he sent by the Princeton road, and a third he set to building entrenchments suitable for a siege of the British commander.

Through the night the Americans fired on the fort,—and such firing! The world had seen little or none of it before because it was firing by American backwoodsmen. Bullets were not just thrown at the palisades. Tiny chinks were noted and bullets sent through them. It is said that Hamilton himself opened a small port hole on

the morning of the 24th, and projected a small telescope into it. A moment later he jumped aside as the glass lens in the telescope was shattered. An unerring backwoodsman of the type of Daniel Boone had seen this tiny bull's-eye, no larger than a silver dollar, and had bored it through.

A truce for breakfast—brought to the fight in the same spirit in which Lafayette had come to aid “Zhorzh Vasington,”—and then Clark sent in a message that perhaps holds the world's record for sheer impudence and bluff. It went from rifle fighters to entrenched foes equipped with cannon:

“Sir: In order to save yourself from the impending storm that now threatens you, I order you to immediately surrender yourselves with all your garrison, stores, etc., for if I am obliged to storm, you may depend on such treatment as is justly due a murderer. Beware of destroying stores of any kind or any papers or letters that are in your possession or hurting one house in town, or, by Heavens, if you do, there shall be no mercy shown you.

G. R. CLARK.

To: Gov. Hamilton.”

What made it possible for the letter to accomplish its aim? Did Hamilton have a guilty conscience before which his spirit bent, or did the hornet-like bullets of the backwoodsmen against which the walls of the fort seemed no protection at all, terrorize the force within? Braddock had been so terrorized by the same kind of warfare.

Whatever the cause, this most impudent cartel ever sent an armed antagonist brought out Governor Hamilton himself under a white flag—after a preliminary exchange of compliments through a subordinate. Thus Henry Hamilton of Canada consented to the lowering of the British flag at Vincennes and the army Francis Vigo had clothed and munitioned marched in to run up the Stars and Stripes—\$12,000 in Vigo's debt.

Victory and a Bill of Debt

The articles of surrender were signed on February 24, 1779, and Governor Hamilton was sent as a prisoner of war to Virginia. There it was proposed to treat him as a “hairbuyer” but men far

from the Virginia frontier saw things in a different light and he was duly exchanged with other British officers. His capture, however, did much to bring forth good treatment for captured Americans, who, up to that time, had been very roughly handled in British camps.

Thus came American power and the American flag to the Wabash. General Clark went his way. Virginia ceded the territory to the new National Government. And thus began a new era for Colonel Vigo, Father Gibault and their friends.

The new American government meant Freedom for the people—and perhaps a little too much freedom, for the government bureaucrats at Washington in the matter of respecting the government's obligations.

Francis Vigo looked at the Stars and Stripes afloat over the old Post,—and then at his drafts. He remembered how he had chewed up and swallowed the letter General Clark had given him to take to Captain Helms at Vincennes so that the British could not get at it after taking him prisoner. Now if his drafts could only be cashed all would be well with him, and his service to General Clark would be without material injury to himself. He went to New Orleans to cash his drafts. The Fiscal Agent of Virginia shook his head. He hadn't any funds. States were new in those days—and portentous changes for the Northwest Territory were at hand. Vigo took that shake of the head as only temporary. He knew he had provided cash and goods to General Clark and, in the righteousness of his claims, he had a full faith that Virginia would pay. He had to have money. He sold two warrants of General Clark's for twenty per cent of their face value and retained the third, having a face value of \$8,616, for himself.

How this warrant was juggled around in government departments and was finally paid under terms that provided for the purchase of "Old Vigo," the Vigo County Court House bell, is a story interwoven with the warp and woof of American history for more than a century following the first rejection of the claim on a plea of poverty, "inf" as the banks note it on returned checks, meaning "insufficient funds."

Terre Haute Remembers

For his great services in bringing American power to the Northwest Territory the only real honor ever given to Francis Vigo was given by the people of Terre Haute. They warmed the final years of his life by a grateful recognition of his services when all the rest of the world had left him to the bitterness of age.

On July 4, 1832, Terre Haute celebrated in young strength by a big parade and barbecue. Leaders of the movement, including the town's first pioneers, wanted to have some distinguished guest of honor. They found that Vigo County, in which their city was a thriving and growing metropolis, was named for "Old Vigo" and that this name linked their home county with Vigo Bay, Galacia, Spain, for this bay named after an ancestor of this same pioneer Indiana citizen.

Colonel Vigo was very old at the time—and feeble. But they escorted him in state from Vincennes and put him in a fine carriage at the head of the parade. In the oration of the day his services were narrated and thus Terre Haute made his cause, the city's cause.

Colonel Vigo's claim was fifty-one years old when he came to Terre Haute as honored guest of the city. When he went away he cherished fond memories of this gracious act of welcome. He was cheered by the story of how he ate the letter that would have disclosed the plans of George Rogers Clark to the British, and how the British who captured him while spying on their fort, took away his valuable loot that he had time to get his letter to the American officer at Vincennes, Captain Helm, out of his inside coat pocket, tear it to bits and swallow it.

One Word of Welcome

In his gratitude for this kind welcome to Terre Haute, and the words of praise said in his honor Colonel Vigo wrote in his will, two years later, that *if* the government ever got around in the course of human events to paying that claim of his, then the city that had treated him so kindly should have a bell for its court house. He was merely thought at the time to be a feeble minded old man with a silly notion about a claim. Yet old Vigo was much in earnest. He had no children to leave his money to. He was a member of the congregation of Father Gibault and had done much to induce the sending of priests

into the Wabash Valley. While he could not read nor write, and most of his communications were signed by his mark, yet friends finally taught him to write four letters. This is why Mrs. Sally Hughes, Librarian of the Emmeline Fairbanks Memorial Library in Terre Haute, cherishes a little piece of paper containing the four letters for a signature "VIGO." He never learned to write, Francis, his first name, but in this matter he was on par with many of the strong men of his generation. General Harrison referred to him on the eve of his presidency as, "one of the most distinguished men I ever knew."

Little came into his life of a cheerful nature after this big party at Terre Haute.

He returned to Vincennes, but his own city knew him no more for he was very poor and very old—over ninety. He was a small man with a sharp face. With the English language he always had difficulty. It is told of him that once while riding across the Wabash valley he saw a settler whose house had just been burned by Indians.

Dollars Become Doleurs

"Mc sorry", he remarked. Then he pulled out a \$20 bill. He gave it to the distressed settler and then added, "Now me sorry no more." This difficulty with English led to another fine story about



him. It was that he tried to get the people to accept the paper dollar bills General Clark had brought into the country to finance the Kaskaskia garrison. The nearest the French could come to pronouncing the word "dollar" was "doleur", which, in their language, meant

“grief” or “pain.” The dollar bills turned out to be worthless for Congress never redeemed them. So that Vigo and his friends who accumulated \$20,000 worth of them knew them always as “doleur” bills and his claim for actual money and supplies furnished to General Clark was known until his sad death as a pauper as his “doleur claim”.



RESTING PLACE OF FRANCIS VIGO

Vigo once owned a splendid house at Vincennes. He built it to welcome General Harrison as governor and built its parlor floor of square blocks of vari-colored hard woods. General Harrison lived there until his own great mansion, the “Harrison House”, that still stands under the care of the Fortnightly Club of Vincennes, was completed. This house was sold in Vigo’s old age and he spent his final two years in the home of Betsy La Plante—a rented home on the southwest side of Main Street between Fourth and Fifth Streets, Vincennes. When he died, Andrew Gardner, sire of several generations

of men who have remained in the undertaking business, wheeled the body to a grave in one of the city's cemeteries, in an odd little cart that is still preserved as a relic. There might also be preserved a receipt for \$20 if the funeral bill has been paid. But so great was Colonel Vigo's destitution, and so "visionary" was his claim against Uncle Sam considered, that the undertaker performed the service as a charity.

Thus passed from mortal affairs a man whose role in the Wabash Valley would have made for him an immortal figure for all time if it had been played out in New York or New England or in Virginia where the limelight of Revolutionary War days beat with its fiercest glow upon patriots and leaders.

Those eastern states had the population then, and the Wabash valley did not. But now the people of Vigo County are numerous and alert and the story of Old Vigo can come into its own.

The Day of Neglect

Of those who perished without funds, without friends, without singers of their own times to glorify their names, Vigo was far from the solitary example. His two great friends and companions in all his heroic undertakings, General George Rogers Clark and Father Pierre Gibault, died as he did after being sadly wrecked on the hostile coasts of Old Age.

General Clark rushed forward in a war emergency, never thinking of himself or of his after-years. His commission was in the Virginia militia, not in the Continental Army, so that he had no means of making a living in the regular military establishment. After Virginia handed over the Northwest territory to the Federal government it handed over its interest in that country with it. The Federal government accepted the land but let its conquerors go. General Clark built himself a cabin in a 6,000 acre grant from Virginia in the midst of which he became very "land poor". He never married but lived alone and in his old age became stricken with paralysis. He so badly burned himself in his cabin fireplace that his left left had to be amputated. All he asked, in lieu of an anesthetic, was that the band play for him military tunes such as the drummer boy, Pierre Charleville, had played when he drummed Clark's men into the icy back-

waters of the Wabash. His sister, Mrs. Crogan, made him a home in his final years, and at her house at Locust Grove opposite Louisville, he lapsed peacefully to his end on February 13, 1818. It is told of him that shortly before he died, he took the sword Virginia had voted him and broke it into bits, after which he cast the broken pieces away with the bitter remark, "When Virginia needed a sword I gave her mine. Now she sends me a toy when I am old and paralyzed and want for bread." Years after his death the government settled, tardily as in the case of Vigo, his claims against it.

Private persons at last rescued his remains from the country graveyard where they had reposed for over fifty years, unmarked, and gave them a proper sepulture in Cave Hill Cemetery, adjoining Louisville. Six bodies were disinterred in the quest for General Clark's but it was located at last through the identification of having the left leg missing.

Pierre Gibault, who had rare skill as an orator and helped mightily with his orations while Vigo could only help with money and his goods, kept his flock loyal to America until old age overcame him as it had his friends. He petitioned the government in his old age for a little plot of ground on which to live—just enough for his home and a little garden. His petition went unheeded and he died, ill and alone and in want at New Madrid, Missouri, in 1804. Being Canadian born, his body was taken home to Canada where it was placed in an unmarked grave,—still awaiting the hour when Historic and Poetic Justice will be done him.

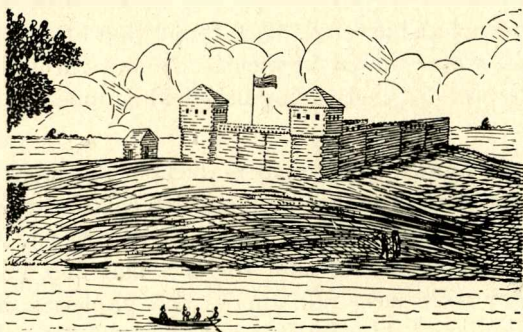
A Wabash Heroine

From the day when Francis Vigo presented his draft for \$11,000 on Oliver Pollock, Virginia's fiscal agent in New Orleans, to the day when "Old Vigo", the courthouse bell at Terre Haute, proclaimed, over a century later, that the draft had been honored, what was Terre Haute doing to come into her own?

The story is one of a town made to measure,—not a town settled by a casual settler around whose fortified-up cabin other settlers congregated. Before there was a house in Terre Haute, surveyors had laid out a townsite and had picked out a site for a public square, a church, a court house, and a school. The streets were laid out for a

great city before the first spade had been sunk into the soil to make a settler's garden.

It is strange that such a city came to be, but the cause lies close to the genius of American government and American life. Virginia gave the broad acres of the Wabash Valley to Uncle Sam, as certified to by the signatures of Thomas Jefferson, Samuel Hardy, Arthur Lee, and James Monroe, March 1, 1784. During the war of 1812 Zachary Taylor had a hard night of it at a fort built by William Henry Harrison for defense against Indians. This fort was on a bluff of land that the French Voyageurs had named *Terre Haute*, as they saw this rising hill from the broad bosom of the Wabash. Harr-



SKETCH OF "OLD FORT HARRISON" TERRE HAUTE, IND.

ison built it in September, 1811, while on his way to fight things out with the "Prophet", brother of the famous Indian chief Tecumseh. Zachary Taylor at the head of a detachment of the Seventh U. S. Regulars garrisoned it in September 1812 and a few nights after taking possession he was splendidly started on his way towards becoming America's twelfth President.

Indians swooped down on the fort when 30 of its 50 defenders were ill. They were encouraged in the assault by the British who thus hoped to carry the war on down into the Ohio Valley from Detroit. At almost the same date Fort Wayne was attacked and in that attack British soldiers as well as Indians participated.

They would have made the affair at Ft. Harrison a massacre except for the very unusual courage of its commander. Zachary Taylor saw the fort set on fire and saw the howling red skins waiting for American scalps in the glow of the flames. It seemed the Americans

surely must perish but he ordered his men to throw up entrenchments behind burning logs so that a rush into the embers would profit the Indians nothing. Julia Lambert, who had come into the fort for shelter with others living in cabins near the fort, performed a service so heroic that night that only the pen of the proper poet is lacking to give her a fame equal to other heroines of American wars. She saw the bucket coming up from the fort's well, filled with mud instead of water, as men worked frantically to put out the flames with this meagre water supply. She thought fast—and acted faster. For she realized that someone must go down the well and fill the bucket with a gourd since it only brought up mud when left to fill itself. She was lowered into the well and worked for hours, filling the bucket with water as fast as it could be raised and lowered. She found that after deepening the well a little the water flowed in plentifully and through her heroic work the flames were at last extinguished while much of the fort remained intact.

The savages howled as the embers died out and went away scalpless, defeated and ready for that action which came a little later in the form of a forced transfer to lands much farther West.

If Terre Haute may be said to have had any inhabitants in those days, they were men and squaws and papooses of the Miami tribe. These Indians held councils on the high bluffs and maintained a fruit orchard on land that is now part of Terre Haute.

The War of 1812 not only gave Fort Harrison a touch of real battle but it created the genesis of the now thriving capital of Vigo County. The government incurred a debt of gratitude to soldiers of the war of 1812 and to pay this debt it proceeded to apply the land-grant principle. Soldiers who had fought in the war thus made their way to the Wabash Valley and thus became possessed of land in Vigo County.

The first group is an interesting group—pioneers and fighters all—who succeeded in building in the Wabash Valley an American community that is perhaps as typical as any spot on earth of what a true American community is. And in addition to that it gave to the nation at least one genius in the person of Paul Dresser who made all the world his debtor for luring the true charm of the Valley into his immortal lyric, "On the Banks of the Wabash."

The Foundation Builders

Here are the names of men who conceived that a city should rise where Terre Haute now stands—Markle, Bullitt, (both Cuthbert and Thomas), Lindley, Laselle, and Kitchell. There were six of them and of the six one was a miller and the father of all Middle Western realtors. This one was Markle—Abraham Markle—who seemed as much born to buy and sell land as he was born to operate flour mills.

To understand how these six operated to make a town of Terre Haute it is necessary to glimpse one little act of the pre-revolutionary era. In 1764 one Captain Thomas Hutchinson of the Sixtieth Royal American Regiment, devised a manner for surveying American lands. It was to divide them into tracts of six square miles and then to divide these tracts into sections each containing a single square mile. This system of surveys was adopted for the Northwest Territory.

When the U. S. Land Office was opened it issued in June 1816, its Land Warrant Number 1. That is a historic warrant in itself. The land thus first deeded by the Department of Interior's land bureau is land that all Terre Haute folks ride through whenever they motor out of town towards the old Markle flour mill.

The land warrant called for one-half section of land, and it was issued to Abraham Markle as a volunteer for the war 1812. Markle had been a New York miller who had gone to Canada during the Revolution, as a loyalist. He had been elected to the Canadian Parliament but when the issues that led to the war of 1812 came up he became a vigorous critic of Canadian policies. America looked good to him again. His fraternal brothers in Masonry helped Markle in his laudable undertaking, which was to escape from Canada and get into the war on the American side. At its close he became entitled to a land grant, and as a realtor and leader among men he desired to buy more land—and do his bit in opening up the great Northwest Territory. So he boldly risked his all on a little flat boat, or rather on three flat boats for he brought with him to the Wabash valley more goods than a single boat would hold. He launched his frail crafts on the Allegheny, floated down that river to Pittsburgh, and then spent two months floating down the Ohio past

Marietta, Cincinnati, and the Falls to the mouth of the Wabash. Up this river he poled his way to the site of Terre Haute.

When Markle's flat boats came to rest off Fort Harrison, he let his instincts as a realtor be his guide for the rest of his actions. He found here a few cabins surrounding Fort Harrison, and people inhabiting them who pronounced the name of the place Tar Holt. They were strangers to the Creole way of speaking. But more than that he found waiting for him a land that teemed with all the riches of nature. He noted the creeks—Spring, Clear, Coal, Otter, Lost, Sugar and Honey. To Markle these meant good sites for flour mills. He noted the level acres—thousands of them and to his practical mind these meant a townsite and surrounding farms. He visioned just the town that now exists,—even to the spot where the center of it should be located out of all the possible places. What was needed was a subdivider or a subdividing syndicate. And the first of these Markle resolved to become while he organized the second.

In those days Land Companies occupied a famous role in the public imagination so it was not difficult for people to accept a small group as "proprietors of the town of Terre Haute," even before the first spade had been set into the ground to create the town. Virginians had tried to form a land company to operate west of the Alleghenies, but their Mississippi Company had been forestalled by the Revolution. The Vandalia Colony of 1773 might have made the Cumberland Gap famous as a pass through which settlers emerged into the Promised Land of Kentucky. But the Continental Congress upset the Kingly power behind the Vandalia Company and the land remained in its virgin state.

Pioneer Land Kings

When Abraham Markle, Hyacinth Laselle, Jonathan Lindley, and the two Bullitt brothers found themselves men of like mind upon the desirability of the site of Terre Haute for a town, they appeared, through Joseph Kitchell, agent before one Squire Stout at Vincennes on the 25th of October, 1816, to declare themselves to the officials of the young State of Indiana as the "proprietors of Terre Haute."

And even in this early land transaction in Vigo County, there was a bit of real estate strategy. For Joseph Kitchell had "talked

long with a poker face" in bidding in certain lands at government auction. He had agreed to pay a fourth down and to give mortgages for the balance of his bid—when he was practically penniless. He had thus obtained a bidder's rights in 3,344 acres. After the public auction Kitchell confided to Abraham Markle, real estate genius, the real state of his finances and his bid. Markle organized his friends and took over the Kitchell bid, and thus the group could call themselves proprietors of their proposed city with Kitchell as their agent. Markle had other lands. Besides his grant of a half section where the Markle mill stands, he had three-fourths of a section covering



land now lying between Seventh and Thirteenth Streets, a mile and a half above Maple Avenue, Terre Haute. Through buying up soldier's claims he obtained 2,080 more acres of Vigo County lands.

Once the "proprietors of Terre Haute" had established their claim through the transfer to them of the Kitchell titles on September 19, 1816, the next step, naturally, was to have a big public auction. Land selling plans have not changed much from then to now. They ran advertisements in the Cincinnati newspapers and in Kentucky newspapers, inviting all and sundry to come to the banks of the Wabash and help establish the town of Terre Haute.

The date of this big barbeque and auction sale was set for October 30-31, 1816, and thus the town's birthday was officially fixed and duly promulgated in advance. People came—great multitudes of them lured by promoters' literature, even as folks would do today.

Down came the bidders on the great Auction Day. They were not left for a minute in doubt as to where the townsite should be, for William Haggett, an engineer and surveyor, had gone over the whole tract and had chosen the best townsite "where the river runs straight and the land is high." He figured that the old fort was no longer necessary as the menace of the British and the Indians had been removed. He figured that the level country was better than the hilly bluffs that first had borne the name of Terre Haute, and he predicted that on the site he had chosen, "a great city will one day arise." Having chosen well, the people bid in the lots in rapid-fire order. Lindley, the Bullitt brothers, Markle, and Laselle emerged from the auction block, rich in promissory notes and variegated securities and little cash. Many years later A. R. Markle, descendant of Abraham Markle, and historian of the family recorded that of the \$21,000 realized in notes and bonds from that great auction sale, nearly all the securities turned out to be worthless.

The original plot of Terre Haute ran from the river to the west side of Fifth Street, the north side of Oak, and the south side of Eagle. Eighth street was known as the Country Road. Once there were lot owners in this tract, home builders they must and did become. From 1818, when Vigo County was organized, down to the present day, it was just a question of who would be first in each line of activity. The score card of Famous Firsts runs something like this:

Dr. Charles B. Modesitt built the first house in the town proper. It was at the south-west corner of Water and Ohio Streets, and was of unhewn logs. It sheltered a wife and little girl Dr. Modesitt had brought with him on horseback to make a new home in the wilderness. Dr. Modesitt became the town's first physician and never complained even at a fifty mile ride to see a sick person for a fee of a bushel of corn or a pelt or two. As a doctor's fee would not sustain their recipient, Dr. Modesitt became also the town's first ferryman, and operated its first mortar for grinding corn. He was a builder and town maker in every sense.

The first store keeper was Lucius H. Scott, and it was a branch of a store kept by Wasson and Sayers in Vincennes. To get a room in which to set up his store Scott rented from Dr. Modesitt in No-

vember, 1817. The river froze and as there were no roads, the goods could not be landed until January 1, 1818.

John Collett, another merchant, put up the first brick dwelling and honored the junction of Ohio and Market Streets with this new departure. His cash? Well he advertised that his store would accept, in payment for goods, "good flour, whiskey, corn, wheat, tallow, beeswax, clean linen and cotton rags."

It seems that neither Scott nor Collett prospered much as merchants for Scott turned school teacher, "for lack of enough to do." He opened his first school on Honey Creek in a 10x10 log cabin.

Of course even so good a town as Terre Haute could not be a real town without a court house and a jail. A lawyer by the name of Nathaniel P. Huntington settled down in the new town. In April, 1818, he duly stirred up the watchdogs of the Law so that he became prosecuting attorney at the first meeting of the Circuit Court. This was "on the fourth Monday in April, 1818." Hence, a court house and a real jail must be built. The good people of the town responded by building a log court house that served Terre Haute for fifty years. It was the first public building in town.

And of course, there being a meeting hall, preachers had to come to Terre Haute. They came not to settle down at first but just to preach in passing. There came this way one Joseph Smith and his associate, Sidney Rigdon, then organizing the church that afterwards moved to the Rockies and settled Salt Lake Valley. Methodist circuit riders, Presbyterian missionaries, Congregational preachers and Catholic fathers from Vincennes cared for the spiritual needs of the settlers. Finally, in 1834, the missionary era gave way to a congregational era in which churches of a half dozen denominations gave dignity and permanency to the town's architecture.

A newspaper Terre Haute must have, and perhaps the way she obtained it is the initial gesture of violence over the issues that caused the Civil War.

Folks in Vincennes were naturally pro-slave for most had come from the South or from countries where slavery was accepted as a matter of course. Terre Haute settlers had mostly floated down the Ohio from eastern and New England states. They were against

slavery and they shared the view of their compatriots of the Northern states on that issue. Hence when the Northwest Territory was declared, by motion in Congress of Nathan Dane of Massachusetts, to be free-state territory, one John W. Osborn, publisher and proprietor of the Western Sun, at Vincennes, found certain citizens of Vincennes selling slaves in Kentucky—to dispose of their own groups of them—he protested in his newspaper. And he soon learned that he had better leave town. He did so making Terre Haute his goal. Here he arrived in 1823, with his press in a little wagon. He again set himself up in business and told how his press had been spilled out of his wagon en route in an “accident” he did not think was entirely without “malice aforethought” on the part of someone or other.

Osborn was an outspoken editor and his career in Terre Haute was as stormy as it had been in Vincennes. He found some folks in Vigo County knew their bottle better than he liked and so he turned temperance crusader and remained such until he died.

In 1827, Terre Haute gained a brick school house at the corner of Fifth and Walnut streets, its master advertising pointedly that he would receive “most any kind of produce for tuition.” Who now are old enough to appreciate the names of the schoolbooks of that generation? There was Webster’s Elementary Spelling Book, Dillworth and Pike’s Arithmetic, Murray’s English Grammar and “any geography a student could procure.”

At Mine Inn

A town could not be a real social center until it had a hotel and an Inn, at which the visitor could “take mine ease.” A tavern-keeper par excellence, Buntin by name, brought this luxury to Terre Haute. He had tall, lean, local customers, whose pride was in the distance they could spit tobacco juice, and visitors from afar, some of whom were world famous. Buntin presided at the “Prairie House” when deer could be shot almost from its windows.

He loved style and ceremony and he dressed local negro gammins up in white coats as waiters. Bare legs below the white coats proclaimed the local origin of such help. The dishes were redolent with the rich supplies of the world’s most fertile valley. “Roast mutton, roast beef, roast lamb, veal pie, chicken pie, roast fowl and roast

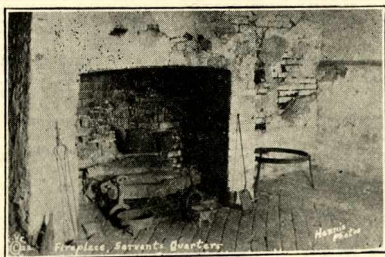
pigeon." were the dishes the colored lads sang out about as they chanted to the diner his choice of the viands of the day.

Buntin presided in state over the carving knife at the head of his hall. The Old Prairie House became famed in negro melodies, for its sweet-toned dinner gong sounded afar through the town at meal time and the colored gammins of the streets composed songs about it. Some of them became a regular part of the Mid West's Negro minstrelsy.

The Coming of the Trains

When Terre Haute first raised church steeples against the sky line canals were counted on to give the city fame and numbers. But canals failed in their purpose. After thirty years Terre Haute sheltered only 4,000 people and "river towns" were springing up all along the Wabash to Fort Wayne.

Terre Haute advertised that it occupied the "prettiest site this side of Heaven." The Wabash and Erie Canal was opened down to



the mouth of the Tippecanoe River. It brought a little traffic to Terre Haute but it also brought some to Montezuma, Covington, Portland, Attica, Williamsport, La Grange and Lafayette—all towns that fought bitterly in the late '20s for supremacy over Terre Haute. A cross-cut canal and many other canals touched the town—but touched it only lightly as to Destiny.

Steamboats became famous in those days. They were the hope for city growth. Their names were as familiar as the names of great commanders in the World War. They were the Victory, Paul Pry, Daniel Boone, William Tell, Fairy Queen, Fidelity, Science and Republican. Lafayette gradually forged ahead under steamship help.

There came a day when a steamer assaulted all the established codes by flaring a sign at all the river towns to the effect that she would receive freight and passengers for Logansport. That was sinful for everyone knew that Lafayette was the "head of navigation." That steamer's efforts to get on up the river became as famous locally as Paul Revere's great ride. They stuffed the boiler with resin and tar and also with sides of bacon. But it was no use. They finally unloaded 200 barrels of flour, but still the little steam boat could not "make the riffle" and Lafayette remained supreme, while all the Wabash valley tittered over the "War of the Paddle Wheels."

Terre Haute folks were not content to remain canalmen and rivermen. They wanted rails. They preached and dreamed and fought for railroads. And when they got them—then Terre Haute began to come into her own. Her population leaped forward. Money rolled in. She built up banks and passenger depots and became a famous center.

The first rail line ran from Terre Haute to Indianapolis and it was opened in 1852. A little later another rail line connected Terre Haute with Evansville, and then came another connecting the Queen City of the Lower Wabash with St. Louis. By 1870 a net work of railroads led from Terre Haute to the nerve centers of practically the whole nation. A line to Chicago completed the town's joy in 1871. And after that? Population rolled in on every train. Vigo's capital city became "a railroad made town," with 25,000 inhabitants in 1873.

Stumps That Decayed

With a start like that a city of workers could do almost anything. The stumps had been left in the streets by the early settlers "until they should decay." By now the process of decay was doing its work. The Stump Town days were going forever. In their place came pavements, business houses, a wealth from the agricultural hinterland and a demand for every modern convenience. Telegraph lines were strung on trees from Terre Haute to St. Louis in 1848, and the first Wabash Valley State Highway connected Terre Haute with Lafayette and Delphi. Thus was opened for wagon traffic what

will soon become one of the most beautiful motor drives of Indiana. Perhaps it may be named the "Dresser Drive" in honor of Paul Dresser, the noted son of Terre Haute, who gave America one of her most beautiful song refrains, "On the Banks of the Wabash Far Away."

In all this era of development the fire engines of Terre Haute played an important role, for the "Old Vamps" were proud of nothing in Terre Haute so much as they were proud of their fire engines. The first they named "Old Hoosier." This they obtained in 1840.

The second they named "Old Vigo." This one they bought in 1855, and housed it in the Fourth Street Fire House. They tired of



PAUL DRESSER. AUTHOR
"ON THE BANKS OF THE WABASH"

Old Vigo in 1867, and sold it to the town of Jasper. But the Vamps, as they grew older, became lonesome for their good servant of earlier days. They went on "Old Vigo's trail" to Jasper, found it still in action pumping water onto fires, and they repurchased it. They brought it back to Terre Haute.

And hereby hangs a tale—and the tolling of a bell. Francis Vigo was thought to be weakminded when he left his will dedicating some of his government claims "if they should ever be paid" for the purchase of a Vigo County Court House bell. They buried Vigo, a pauper, in practically a pauper's grave. Yet his just claim told its own convincing story at Washington, and in 1875, it was paid with interest. Vigo County was offered its bell by administrators of the

estate, but the county officials decided the court house was not quite worthy of its promised bell. They wanted a better one to house it. And this better one they built. In its steeple they put "Old Vigo," the bell, and into its basement they wheeled "Old Vigo" the fire engine. Thus rests in security and peace the fame of the Spanish soldier who became an American, who helped America when she was weak in the Valley of the Wabash, who knew intimately two struggling men who "carried on" until they became the ninth and twelfth Presidents of the United States, and who found in Terre Haute good friends who would honor him in his old age when all the world, otherwise had let his fame and fortunes crumble in neglect. Vigo County, then, is a county that can always be very proud to bear its name.

We finish, thus, the story of him from whose service so much that is worth while in the lower Wabash Valley took its rise. He was a strong, virile man, of bold spirit as were the backwoodsmen who came after him and cried, "Who's here?" (Hoosier) as they rode up to some cabin in a forest clearing. All did their best in their day.



This brief summary of the beginnings of Terre Haute and Vigo county, woven through with the heroic life of Francis Vigo and the score and more of other stalwart pioneers who laid their foundations, is presented to the men, women, and especially the children of Terre Haute and Vigo County, in grateful appreciation and recognition for the part they've played in preparing a place for those of us who now enjoy this wonderful Wabash Valley.

The quality of character, the worthiness, the integrity, the struggle to win and the determination to build for his country, which so forcefully marked the character of Francis Vigo furnishes the reason for the name we have chosen for a bakery that shall present a loaf of commensurate worthiness and value, and which shall always be a credit to his name—Hoosier Maid Bread.

Vigo Bread Company